



VINCENT C. GRAY
MAYOR

October 8, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Leader:

On behalf of the 632,000 residents of the District of Columbia, I request an immediate meeting with each of you to explain why Congress must pass, and the President must sign, emergency legislation exempting the District from the federal government shutdown.

In no other part of our country are Americans facing the loss of basic municipal or state services due to the federal government shutdown. Families in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Las Vegas are not worried that their local governments won't be able to maintain basic services like schools, police and fire protection, or trash collection – and neither should families here in the District of Columbia. But once again, our citizens find themselves innocent bystanders to a federal government shutdown – made even more insulting because we have no voting voice in Congress – and an archaic and unjust federal law prevents us from spending our own local tax dollars to provide services for which our residents have already paid. This is simply unconscionable. And it is long past time for the District's budget to be decoupled from the federal budget.

Last week, I determined that all of the services provided by the District of Columbia Government were essential to our residents and those who visit and do business in the District, including elected federal officials. For the time being – and because the District, through our own sound fiscal management, is in much better financial shape than the federal government – we are able to continue paying for those services through the use of contingency funds. However, those funds will soon be exhausted, and the federal shutdown may continue indefinitely. This means that, without budget autonomy for the District, very soon there will be severely negative consequences for us – consequences that no other state or city will be forced to endure.

Even with the use of those contingency funds, we are already seeing the harmful impact of the federal shutdown. For instance, the District has been forced to delay payments to Medicaid providers, putting the health of tens of thousands of people at risk even while other states are free to continue spending Medicaid funds. Our brand-new DC Health Link – the District's Affordable Care Act (ACA) health-insurance marketplace, which federal officials have pointed to as an exemplar of ACA implementation – is confronted with the prospect of closure because it is not able to access funds, including federal grants that pass through the District's budget. And the region's public safety has been compromised because, unlike any other city in America, the federal government shutdown prohibits the District from distributing federal Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) funding to states, counties, and cities within the National Capital Region – funding essential for the continued protection of strategic and high-visibility targets in our area.

And the list of dire consequences will only grow: Furloughed federal workers and congressional staff who work in the District are eligible for unemployment insurance benefits, but where are they to apply if the District is unable to administer its program with our local funds? The District has already been forced to delay payments to regional entities like the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro). Additionally, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water), which is independent of the District government but also requires congressional approval of its budget, is also now operating exclusively on its own limited contingency fund. What happens when their cash reserves run out? And shortly, the District will be unable to make its quarterly payment to public charter schools, many of which will be unable to absorb this blow to their finances.

I have done all that I possibly can to ensure that the health, safety and welfare of District residents is not endangered by a crisis that our city has had no hand in creating. But time is running out – and, soon, I will have exhausted every resource available to me to protect our residents, our workers, and our visitors.

Many leaders on both sides of the aisle, including President Obama, Majority Leader Reid, Majority Leader Cantor and House Oversight Committee Chair Issa, have already acknowledged the common sense of giving the District budget autonomy for our local funds – and yet our residents, workers and visitors continue to suffer. We are simply asking to be treated like every other state or municipal government in this country: give our elected officials the simple ability to use our own tax dollars to meet the needs of our residents and visitors.

It is time for you to act. I look forward to speaking with each of you.

Sincerely,


Vincent C. Gray